*The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde

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Page 44 – page 89

**Summary**

In this section, Dorian Gray acts on Lord Henry’s advice to learn everything he can and wanders into a playhouse, where he watches a young actress named Sybil Vane. He falls in love with her, and declares this love to Henry. Sybil is thrilled to have the attention of a man as handsome as Dorian, and Henry accompanies him to one of Sybil’s performances. Soon after, Henry learns that Dorian and Sybil are engaged to be married. Sybil’s mother and brother, James, are cautious towards the sudden romance, and James pledges to kill Dorian should he ever hurt Sybil in any way. Basil and Henry have conflicting opinions on the engagement. The three men attend a performance of Sybil’s, where her acting is terrible – horrifying Dorian. She explains that her love for Dorian is so great that she can no longer fake emotion, and her acting career is over. Dorian realizes it was her acting that he loved, and stone-heartedly rejects her. Before going to sleep, he resolves to make amends with Sybil the next day. In the morning, Lord Henry tells him that Sybil has killed herself. He convinces Dorian that it is just “artistic expression” and the two attend the opera that night. During this time, Dorian notices subtle changes to his portrait by Basil – changes that make him appear to be crueler.

**Analysis**

This part of the book was really shocking. Clearly, Dorian was extremely naïve, and it was almost sad to watch him lose his innocence in this way. It was fairly easy to predict that something would happen to Sybil after James made his proclamation to protect her, but still, I did not expect her to commit suicide. Dorian’s reaction to her death was completely disappointing, but was an obvious result of Henry’s control over him. Dorian had almost this child-like innocence, and to see him morph into this careless creature was awful. Furthermore, I see now that between both Basil and Henry, Basil truly does love Dorian and is concerned for him, whereas Henry views him as a game and aims to corrupt his mind.

**Application**

The life and death of Sybil reflects probably the most basic human characteristic of all: love. During Sybil’s life, she, like so many others, sought love, and found that through Dorian. Dorian’s love, however, was rather an infatuation with Sybil’s acting. Dorian rejected Sybil after her loved surpassed her acting skills, causing Sybil to kill herself. Her only desire, to love and be loved, had betrayed her. Love can also be viewed through James’s pledge to protect his sister and Basil’s growing concern over Dorian’s maturation as a young man. Though different variations of love – familial, platonic, and romantic – love was the most commonly seen characteristic expressed throughout this section, a characteristic that is best known for its everlasting existence.